ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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April 1998

ABSTRACT

The Salem Fire Rescue Department under went a reorganization in 1997. The purpose of the reorganization was to make resources available so that the department could provide advance life support ambulance service. The administration of the department working with the union was able to prevent privation of the municipal ambulance service the year before. However, it recognized the department was competing at a disadvantage by only providing basic life support level service.

The reorganization realigned the resources of the department so that its primary service shifted from fire suppression to ambulance services. This realignment coincided with the service demands the department has been experiencing since 1990.

Imbedded in the subculture of the employees of the department was a tremendous disdain to being assigned to ambulance duties. After the reorganization the majority of the department's company officers personified this anti-ambulance subculture.

The administration of the department found itself with an interesting paradox. They believed the future of the department depended on providing more advanced and better quality ambulance services. However, the future leaders of the organization did not share this vision. In some instances it was believed they were working in opposition to it.

"On paper" the new design of the department certainly configured it to provide a better level of service, however; to maximize its potential the department's administrative staff felt it would be necessary to build a new organizational culture based on new paradigms.

This study used historical and action research methodologies. The research questions answered in this study were:

1. Where did our anti-ambulance organizational culture come from?

2. How was it passed on?

3. What plan might be employed to change this subculture of the department?

By interviewing some of the first generation of Salem firefighters and by surveying and interviewing some of the present, a plan was formulated and implemented. Early results of the plan have been encouraging, but; it has shown once this process is begun it needs to become a "way-of-life" for an organization.

Based upon the research done for this report; leaders in private industry have been looking at an organization's culture as a vehicle to introduce effective change for at least the last 30 years. It is ironic that fire service leaders who operate in an organization rich in culture are only now beginning to understand it, use it, and direct it.

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INTRODUCTION

The Salem Fire Department provides fire suppression and emergency medical services for the community of Salem, New Hampshire. The Town of Salem has a residential population of 30,000 and a daytime population of 150,000. Annually the department responds to 4,000 requests for service of which 2,600 are of an emergency medical nature and the balance of 1,400 involve traditional fire department activities.

Salem is located geographically at the midpoint between Boston, Massachusetts, and Concord, New Hampshire, and sits astride Interstate Route 93. Route 93 is one the major overland shipping routes between the economic market of New England and Eastern Canada. Its location and New Hampshire's favorable business tax status produces a very vibrant local economy. For the last ten years the town has experienced an average growth rate of 3% per annum. The annual commercial/industrial average growth rate for that same period has been 5%. A result of these growth patterns is that Salem residents pay some of the lowest property taxes in the state of New Hampshire. Property taxes are the major funding source for municipal governments in Hew Hampshire.

Despite Salem's strong economy, community growth, and relatively low tax burden its municipal services have not escaped economic difficulty. During the summer of 1997, the Fire Department underwent a major reorganization. The primary goal of the reorganization was to realign the distribution of the department's assets to reflect the larger service demand in emergency medicine. This was accomplished by reducing the number of mid-level managers (company officers & shift commanders) within the fire suppression forces and using a portion of the savings to fund paramedic level ambulance service. A secondary goal of the reorganization was to reduce the number of

department employees so as to make additional funds available for the implementation of expanded services by other municipal departments.

The managerial style of Salem's town manager precluded any advance notification of the impending reorganization. When the reorganization was publicly announced it came as a surprise to the unionized members of the department. The announcement had an immediate fragmenting effect on the union membership. Fully one third of the union membership stood to have their career path delayed or irrevocably altered, one third had career paths and professional advancement opportunities opened to them, and the final third was not effected at all. Due to the lack of common cause the union leadership could not rally their membership to effectively influence the reorganization plan.

On September 1, 1997, the Salem Fire Department was reorganized into the Salem Fire Rescue Department. The depth of the change effected the organization at all levels. Over night the paradigms upon which the department had built its culture were gone and in their place was a new mission statement and operational directives.

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The present culture of the Salem Fire Rescue Fire Department appears to have developed during the decade of the 1980's. To understand how it came into being, one must understand the history of the department within the history of the community.

The Salem Fire Department came into existence on May 13, 1905, on that date the town assumed financial responsibility for what had heretofore been a private fire company. From 1905 until 1964 the department was staffed by call-men, who were paid a stipend when they were "called" to the scene of a fire.

In 1964 two events occurred that would have significant future impacts both on the town and the department. The first: the competition of the construction of Interstate Route 93, between Salem, and Boston, Massachusetts. The second: the local undertaker decided he could no longer provide the growing community with ambulance services and donated two ambulances to the town. Town Meeting that year appropriated the funds necessary to hire eight full time paid firefighters to staff one of the ambulances full time.

The construction of Interstate Route 93 initiated unprecedented growth in Salem, as the community grew from 4,000 residents in 1968 to 20,000 by 1988. As the town grew so did fire department staffing, however; the funding complications created by an Annual Town Meeting usually meant increases in staffing lagged the demand for service by 12 to 18 months.

The next significant event to effect both the town and department occurred during the early to mid 1980's. In response to the marketing strategies of the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) many Salem, residents began to install wood stoves as a secondary source of home heating.

The department had not anticipated, nor could it react quickly enough to regulate the installation or educate citizens in the use of wood stoves. The result was a four year period still refereed to by the "old-timers" as the "happy times." During the heating season structure fires were occurring weekly with marked increases during "cold snaps."

"Do you think we'll get a job tonight?," was asked with excited anticipation at the beginning of each shift. The fire apparatus was reverently maintained in a state of readiness and moral was acknowledged to be the best ever.

In 1982 a new fire chief was hired by the town. Unlike his predecessors he was not from the community, had no previous experience on the Salem Fire Department, and was well educated. By using Salem's most recent fire statistics he was able to convince the town as to the necessity to enlarge and organize the fire department after some of the models used by major cities in northern Massachusetts.

Not willing to absorb the financial increases in one year, a four year plan to increase fire department staffing was adopted by the town. The department grew from 50 in 1984, until in 1988, when it reached its maximum of 75. Line personnel grew from two captains, four lieutenants, and 38 firefighter/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) to four captains, 16 lieutenants, and 44 firefighter/EMTs.

The characteristics of the individuals promoted as the officer corps expanded became the paradigms upon which the present organization's culture is based. Aggressive interior firefighting, excellent fire apparatus operating skills, an abhorrence of emergency medicine, staunch refutation of criticism, and a "the ends justifies the means-just get the job done" attitude had become the stuff good

firefighters are made of.

It did indeed make good firefighters. Fire ground skills, coordination, and efficiency increased dramatically. The department's reputation became one of a conceited, self centered, elite firefighting force and the members of the department reveled in it.

Before the department reached its zenith, OPEC was in trouble. Unable to maintain strict oil production quotes it lost much of its ability to dictate oil prices. As the price of oil fell so did the number of structure fires in Salem. In 1985, structure fires numbered 36; in 1989 it had fallen to three. By 1990 it was obvious the "happy times" were over.

The 1990 Town Meeting established a trend of not funding vacant firefighter positions. As employees left the department they were not replaced, however; the strength of the officers corps was maintained at four captains and 16 lieutenants. Most members of the department believed something was going to happen and the lost firefighter positions would be restored, but; by 1991 it was clear (to those who wanted to see it) the future of the department was in emergency medical services. In 1992, the fire chief who had been responsible for the growth of the department left and in 1993, a new chief was hired.

There was a great internal expectation of the new chief, he should "just tell them," and by his spoken word, the political leaders of the community would restore staffing. Through budget requests in 1994, and 1995, an attempt was made to restore the lost positions. The requested positions were not the lost firefighter/EMTs, but; paramedics. Service demand had obviously shifted away from traditional fire service to emergency medicine. Restoration of the positions did not happen and the downsizing through attrition continued.

During 1996, a private ambulance service approached the town with an offer to provide ambulance service. Both the fire department staff and the union administration lobbied hard to prevent the lost of the ambulance service from the fire department. It was widely acknowledged that privatization of the ambulance service would cost the department 8 positions and 1.1 million of its 4 million dollar budget. In the end the private company failed in its bid to provide services to the town simply because they did not have the proper network with their proponents in town government. They were unable to capitalize on the strength of their supporters and the pro-fire department lobby was able to "divide and conquer" their effort.

The principle reason the private ambulance service found as much support as it did was their ability to provide paramedic level services and the fire department did not. As 1996 came to a close, the fire department administration decided the time had come to redirect and refocus the principal mission of the department. No longer could the department afford to be a fire fighting service which also provided ambulance transports, it needed to become an emergency rescue ambulance service that also fought fires.

By the spring of 1997, there were 51 line personnel consisting of four captains, 16 lieutenants, and 31 firefighters/EMTs. During the summer of 1997 the department was reorganized and reduced to 48 line personnel consisting of four captains/EMTs, eight lieutenants/EMTs, eight paramedics, and 28 firefighters/EMTs.

Prior to the reorganization the captains were assigned to a staff vehicle and functioned as shift commanders responding to emergency scenes and performing the role of incident commander. After the reorganization the newly created paramedics were assigned to the captain's staff vehicle which was

reconfigured into a non-transport advanced life support unit. The captains were assigned to an engine company in place of the lieutenants whose positions were eliminated.

Expansion of ambulance services to include paramedic level service had been a department goal since 1993. The price was heavy; it cost the department's training officer, fire marshal, eight lieutenant positions, a reduction in the pay scale of the captains, and 3 positions lost to the police department. As officer positions were cut, a "bump" down of least senior personnel occurred resulting a very "experienced" officer's corps. Many of the enthusiastic and motivated younger officers found themselves back in the firefighter rank.

On the other hand individuals who had been seeking professional development in the area of emergency medicine suddenly found themselves in demand. Emergency medical services was fleshed out as a separate division under the command of a newly promoted deputy chief and two thirds of the department training funds were allocated to the new division.

Much had changed within the department, the form had been realigned to follow function, yet; what had not changed was the shared believes of the officer corps. Many of them had been promoted over 12 years ago and still espoused the paradigms that a "good" firefighter was aggressive at interior firefighting, demonstrated an abhorrence of emergency medicine, staunchly refuted criticism, and if "the system ain't broke don't fix it."

On September 3, 1997, two days after the reorganization took effect the chief met with his staff one assistant chief and two deputy chiefs. During that meeting a very candid discussion took place relative to the future of the department. We were trying to lead the department in a direction most of the supervisors (company officers) did not want to go. Like it or not we were very dependent upon

these supervisors to direct the day to day operations of the department and oversee our level of service delivery. Firefighting would always be a function of the department, but; for the immediate future emergency medical services is where the service demand was greatest. Lastly we needed to develop leaders who in time could lead the department unrestrained or tethered by the past.

Administrators may dictate production and may mandate quality levels, but; unless they are omnipresent, they must trust someone else to carry out their instructions. It is self evident, that it is lunacy to believe a disenfranchised supervisory staff will maximize resources to their greatest potential. In order to accomplish these goals we felt we must change the culture of our organization. Somehow we must harness the enthusiasm and esprit-de-corp, the spirit of the Salem Fire Rescue Department which had transformed it into the finest firefighting force in the Merrimack Valley.

This research project is relevant to the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership course in the topic area of organizational culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before an organization's culture can be changed it must first be identified. McGregor (1960) wrote about successful management. He recognized that from time to time a company must redirect its efforts to conform to changes in its markets. He also noticed some companies, a distinct minority, were able to respond to changes in their environment much faster than others. Based upon his observations he recorded, most companies employed strict authoritarian control over their employees.

If there is a single assumption which pervades conventional organizational theory it is that authority is the central, indispensable means of managerial control. This is the basic principle of organization in the textbook theory of management. The very structure of the organization is

a hierarchy of authoritative relationships (McGregor, 1960, pg.18).

Since most companies practiced strict authoritative control and most companies had trouble when the need came to refocus, he wondered if there was something different happening in companies that could refocus easily. When he looked into the matter he found something, and the something he found, he called social influence.

Social influence he argued was a stronger controlling force in companies than authority, and understanding and using social influence to redirect a company separated managers from leaders. Social influence had several components the major one being "organizational relationships." Organization relationships occurred between employees and employees, and between employees and management. Unlike human relationships which are based on human nature and human behavior, organizational relationships are based on shared assumptions. These assumptions evolved through "...a process of selective adaptation to varying conditions..." (McGregor, 1960).

McGregor, contended the most effective way to effect change in an organization was to introduce new adaptations, which; would change the assumptions, which; would change the organizational relationships, which; would change the social influence. Managers who could effect change using this method were able to do so more completely and were able to use less discipline.

McGregor also believed the new adaptations would come from the ranks of the company's workers once they understood the need. All management had to do was to provide an avenue for employees to submit their ideas, explain their ideas, and be recognized for their contribution to the company. He closes his arguments with the final thought, "Then, and only then, will management discover how seriously it has underestimated the true potential of human resources." (McGregor,

1960).

By 1984, McGregor's, social influences had grown into organizational cultures. Schein (1984) crafted a definition of organization culture that he believed would allow an understanding of what it was and how it evolves.

Organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein 1984, pg.3).

He further developed his theories by defining patterns of basic assumptions. Assumptions he argued are behaviors that have been taken-for-granted for so long that the original cause for the behavior has dropped out of awareness.   The longer the length of time between the loss of memory concerning the need for the behavior and the present, the stronger the assumption is believed that it is "how things really are." Therefore, Schein insisted, to understand the culture of an organization today, we must identify the problems it successfully overcame in its past. The process of repeatedly solving a reoccurring problem is how cultural norms are developed.

Schein also suggested individuals living within a culture "...would not necessarily know how the culture arose, how it came to be, what it is, or how it could be changed if organizational survival were at stake." (Schein 1984). He felt organization culture could be changed in very young organizations fairly easily, because; the reasons for the behaviors upon the cultural assumptions were based are still alive within the "institutional memory" of the organization. As an organization reaches mid-life the culture can

be changed, but; not without conflict, especially if senior management is unaware of some of its own cultural assumptions. Lastly, organizations that have reached maturity may not be able to change their culture. Change will be a painful process and will elicit strong resistance. In this final case it may be necessary to replace large numbers of people who wish to hold on to all of the original culture.

In 1993, Schein, wrote about organizational learning. In his article he suggested a method to change the culture in mature organizations. First, management must create a crisis that will produce anxiety within the organization. Second, the anxiety must be supported by intense communication and education so employees are convinced the old ways of doing things just don't work any more. Third, a cognitive solution or a direction of change that will lead to safety must be introduced. Lastly, a reward system must be in place to recognize the new behaviors.

He concluded, once management has started a learning process and created an opportunity to "try out" new things without fear of punishment, the reward system is the essential learning tool. In such an environment a "...learning system can be [used] to build a culture more conducive to perpetual learning, drawing particularly upon group support to cope with anxiety." (Schein, 1993).

By 1994, authors such as Cummings, Huse, Watson, and others had written extensively on the need for business to adapt quickly to changes in their markets. The theory that companies from time to time needed to react to changes in their markets appears to have been well established. It is almost impossible to read any current literary work on management and not be lectured on the need to react quickly to "the ever changing market place." In fact to truly be successful one must now anticipate how the market will change and get there before it.

Collectively, the following authors ascribed to the constant need for change, indeed it is the very

topic that inspired them to set their thoughts to paper. They have also expressed an opinion that using the culture of an organization is the most effective way of bringing the workforce "on board with the change." However, each after his own fashion has suggested a different method of cultural change.

In 1994, Hamel & Prahalad, wrote of a business's core competencies in much the same way Schein had of organization assumptions. Core competencies are skills developed by a particular business that allowed that business to capture a share of their market. They were the best way of doing something when they were learned. However, just as they were once learned, they will some day need to be forgotten.

Like dinosaurs threatened by cataclysmic climatic changes, companies often find it impossible to cope with a radically altered environment. The oft-used analogy of dinosaurs is, thankfully, not entirely apropos to companies. Dinosaurs died off because the species was unable to adapt fast enough to changing conditions. Evolution is a slow process, relying as it does on small, unplanned genetic mutations-some of which incrementally improve the species' chances of survival, and most of which don't. Fortunately for corporate dinosaurs, a company's "genetic coding" can be altered in various ways. In fact, any company that fails to reengineer its genetic coding periodically will be as much at the mercy of environmental upheaval as tyrannosaurus rex (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994, pg. 49).

A company's genetic coding gets reengineered when its core competencies are "leveraged". It was their belief that failure to leverage core competencies on a regular basis can result in a threat to the survival of a company.

Leveraging is accomplished through the restricting or redistribution of resources. When an

environment fails to provide the resources necessary to prolong a competency, the competency will be altered by the employees to overcome the deficiency. When competencies are identified that satisfy the new environment they will become core competencies.

Champy (1995) wrote of the effectiveness of using an organization's culture to introduce change. "Behavioral change can be accelerated if you formalize the "doing" beyond managers, creating what Arizona Public Service describes as "champions of change" and "cultural warriors" (Champy 1995). Cultural warriors, are individuals who constantly model desired behaviors on a day-to-day basis, to help influence and educate their peers. This model for cultural change is based on the premise that employees will model themselves after fellow employees who appear to be doing things that work better. Champy believed it is this modeling of successful individuals that starts or changes an organization's culture. However he adds this caution, "Don't live too long with people who refuse to change their behavior, especially if their work is important to achieving your reengineering goals. Your tolerance of old behaviors signals that you are not serious about change." (Champy, 1995).

Katzenbach & the RCL Team, (1995) quoted Anita Ward, senior vice president of Texas Commerce Bank, who has appeared to have combined some of the thoughts of the authors mentioned above.

It's the anthropologist in me who says, respect the culture you're in Go in and learn about it...then maximize it and utilize it...make the change effective within that social structure. I do not want to come into an organization and destroy the culture. I want to leverage the [existing] culture for adaptive change.

It's the greatest lesson...that anyone can learn. All of us pick up a book on

reengineering, and go, oh, I should organize this like Michael Hammer says, or like...so, we place this model over our organization and can't figure out why it didn't work. It didn't work because we didn't respect the culture and didn't leverage the existing core of the culture that you need to make effectively happen (Katzenbach & the RCL Team, 1995, pg. 152).

Katzenbach & the RCL Team, went on to argue that to effect meaningful change, leaders must have a thorough understanding of the organization's culture. Once the culture is understood it then may be subjected to change by subjecting it to several phases. A discovery phase is followed by a redesign phase and finally the implementation phases when the new norms are integrated into the culture. Discoveries occur when the core of the culture is leveraged (challenged) to find new processes or products. By applying leverage on a regular basis a company can develop a "can do/will do culture." It is this can do/will do culture that should be the final objective of all managers as they manage their work force.

Hammer, (1996) in his book "Beyond Reengineering," wrote about the importance of the reward system when attempting to change culture.

"Most companies' compensation systems were ...designed to reinforce and perpetuate behavior inimical to change. When employees are paid for putting in time, time--not creativity-- is what employers can expect from them. When incentive plans reward success but ignore or punish worthy failure, even the boldest innovators will limit themselves to sure bets...

The cultural values embedded in most organizations celebrate precision. An aspiring manager made a good impression with exactitude, not hunches (Hammer, 1996, pg. 210).

By not rewarding the bold and the daring Hammer argued, few in the workforce would be

inventing, discovering, or developing new behaviors to resolve new problems.

From the literary research a working definition of organizational culture had emerged that was adopted for this project. The organizational culture of the Salem Fire Rescue Department is a set of share beliefs that govern the correct way for the members of the department to perceive, think, and feel about their department. The research also indicated that organizational culture is distinct for every organization and to be successful in a given culture one must know it and its history (Mitchell & Burdick, 1985). Clearly to be successful at changing the culture of the department more must be known about its distinctive culture.

PROCEDURES

For much of the 19 years I been employed by the Salem Fire Rescue Department I have existed both within and without of its culture. Early in my career I was transferred to the Bureau of Fire Prevention. The Bureau, although under the umbrella of the fire department was housed in the inspection department of the municipal office building. By being a member of the department and at the same time not in the department on a day to day basis gave me an opportunity to observe and track the development of our organizational culture, albeit I didn't know it as such at the time.

I decided the best course of action was to expand what I believed I already knew about our culture, and to do this I would interview retired members of the department, and question through survey the present membership.

In February of 1998, I met with two retired members of the department. They were both what I would call "first generation" Salem Firefighters. They were not included in the original hiring of eight full timers in 1964, they were both hired in 1965, and both retired in 1985. I explained to them that by

the time I was hired in 1979, being assigned to the ambulance was considered the worst duty

assignment there was. For the last 19 years I have watched the disdain of being assigned to the

ambulance intensify. Articles have been included in several collective bargaining agreements covering

who, how, and when the ambulance would be staffed. Now in 1998, by some cruel twist of fate the

ambulance service is the vehicle upon which the future of the department appears solely dependant. It

was my hope that by meeting with these men I could gain some insight as to how such an anti-

ambulance culture began.

They recounted the story of how the emergency medicine became a fire department service

when the two ambulances were donated to the town. In 1964, New Hampshire had no formal

ambulance attendance requirements and the town had not hired firefighters before. So it was left to the

chief to hire the first full timers from the call force. He hired the best firefighters, with very little thought

to the fact these people were being hired to staff an ambulance. The original group of firefighters did not

like providing ambulance service and could not wait until someone else was hired. They had persuaded

the chief to staff the ambulance with the least junior personnel. It was always thought the ambulance

was a fad and would be taken over by someone else. Sometime during the middle 1960's, one of the

firefighters coined the phrase "the pay's, the same", meaning the firefighter who answered the least

amount of ambulance calls was paid the same as the one who answered the most. This lead to intense

competition to avoid leaving the station, especially at night when the firefighters were allowed to sleep.

Sometime later when officers were added to daily staffing they used the dislike of ambulance

assignments as a punishment detail.

The belief that ambulance assignments were given as punishment was alive and well when I

joined the force in 1979. Whenever an officer assigned a more experienced or better qualified senior

firefighter to the ambulance the general concession was he was being punished.

During March, 1998, I developed the two surveys, one for firefighters (Appendix A) and one

for company officers (Appendix B). I have long believed a fire department is only as strong as its

company officers. So before a plan to reverse our ambulance paradox could be formulated I wanted

more information regarding our company officers.

I issued the surveys to 36 firefighters and 12 company officers, 33 firefighters and all of the

officers returned completed forms. I believed the number of surveys returned nearly 100% validated

the results.

Some of the results of the surveys were not surprising: the vast majority had entered the

fire service to fight fires; the salary and benefits package were good; the demands of the job had

changed from when they were first hired; communications from top management needed improvement;

the union and management should work together when the department is threatened; their extra efforts

were going unnoticed; and the company officers felt they were responsive to the needs of their

firefighters.

Some of the results were surprising: the firefighters rated relationships with upper management

higher than relationships with their company officers; and the firefighters did not feel the company

officers were very responsive to their needs.

The survey also showed the majority of the department did not believe the principal reason for

the reorganization of the department was to expand ambulance service. The fact that money was taken

from the fire department and used to fund new police officer positions lead them to believe the root

cause was a weak fire chief.

After reviewing the results of the surveys I decided it would be necessary to interview a few members of the department to better understand the dynamics of the culture.

In April, 1998, I interviewed several firefighters and asked them what they thought were the major problems facing the department. In addition to the department's moral they identified three major problem areas. Lack of on going professional development for the company officers was their principal concern. They felt the officers had grown stale and had not stayed abreast of changes in the fire service.

Second, they felt the need for additional emphasis on the ambulance side of the business. All of the present officers were promoted through a selection process that emphasized firefighting skills. They felt future officers should better balanced in the management of emergency medicine. Lastly, they wanted recognition for their extra effort; not necessarily more money maybe a "gold star."

RESULTS

This study began seeking a solution to a paradox, an organization of intelligent and well respected individuals working hard to sever its life line. Case in point, the delivery of ambulance services is now the principal reason for the existence of the Salem Fire Rescue Department. However; the company officers, and in all probability the future leaders of the organization do not willingly manage the service to its fullest potential.

To solve this paradox it was believed three questions must be answered.

1. Where did our anti-ambulance organizational culture come from?

2. How was it passed on?

3. What plan might be employed to change this subculture of the department?

Based upon my investigations I have come to the conclusion that the problem the current administration is trying to deal with began the day the first full-time firefighters were hired. The chief simply hired the wrong people for the job. He hired firefighters to staff an ambulance. Someone in the department, perhaps the chief himself felt the ambulance service would be a "flash in the pan" and be taken over by some other entity.

The anticipation of the departure of the ambulance service turned to frustration as competition and "one-up-man-ship" developed within the ranks of the firefighters. The final indignity came when fire officers realized they could use the dislike for ambulance staffing as a means of discipline.

Over the years as the department was expanded, additional "firefighters" were hired, individuals who came to believe that when they had "paid their dues" they would be assigned to staff fire apparatus. One of the greatest incentives to seek promotion was the fact that officers were not assigned to the ambulance. Thus through its hiring practices and reward system (promotions) the department's administrations constantly reinforced and perpetuated the subculture.

A plan to change the subculture of this organization should include all of the strategies discovered through the literary research. Changing the hiring practices and hiring individuals more ambulance orientated would introduce new employees less likely to assimilate into the present subculture.

Leverage resources away from fire suppression and make them available to the ambulance services. Such a move would clearly illustrate managements commitment to the change and allow opportunities for experimentation in methods of service delivery. Identify, empower, and support the

ambulance service advocates within the department. Create "change warriors" to serve as living

examples to their peers to show that there is a better way of doing business.

Reward the employees who have learned the behaviors upon which the new culture will be built.

Invest attention in them, let them know someone is watching and their efforts are making a difference.

In the case of the Salem Rescue Department the following plan has been set into place.

The hiring processes has been revamped. It includes three parts: a written comprehension test

with no evaluation of firefighting skills; an appearance before an oral board comprised of the

department's senior staff; and an interview with the chief. The focus of the testing process has moved

away from finding "firefighting clones" to identifying individuals with diverse skills and talents who may

be trained to be firefighters.

The department's senior staff was reassigned so that a deputy chief could be assigned to the

newly created EMS Division. By creating an EMS division, EMS has been placed on the same level of

importance as fire suppression and fire prevention which had been the only two divisions within the

department.

Training funds have been allotted proportionally to the divisions based upon service demand.

This allowed for a comprehensive, monthly, in-service, EMS training program administrated through our

local hospital. Training funds allocated for fire suppression have been used to develop a quarterly,

professional development, training program for the company officers.

A quality assurance team was established. The team on a monthly basis conducts peer reviews

of randomly selected ambulance responses and publishes recommendations for improvements or

certificates of excellence as warranted.

An awards system with ribbons and medals similar to military decorations disproportionally weighted to EMS activities has been established. Any member of the department may recommend any other member for an award. The recommendations are reviewed by senior staff and if granted the chief hosts a "luncheon" and presents the awards.

The last element of the plan was the gathering of the officers for a "venting" session. At the conclusion of the session they were told the direction and focus of the department had changed. Like it or not the reorganization was a beginning not an ending. It would be nice if we could all meet the future together, but; we were moving forward with or without them. The choice was theirs. However, those who lingered too long in the decision making process would find the decision made for them.

The plan has been dynamic and has under gone several revisions since its inception that listed above is its current configuration.

DISCUSSION

I have been very fortunate in that the reorganization of the department occurred just before I attended the National Fire Academy class on Executive Leadership. While the members of my department were still reeling from the shock, I was discussing organization theory and its application to situations like the one I left in Salem.

In the reorganization I had been promoted to Assistant Chief, undisputedly the executive (second-in-command) officer of the department. The chief's expectations were that I would manage the department and he would function as our "Ambassador-at-large." So I would have an opportunity to implement firsthand these fine organizational theories.

The delivery of the reorganization ran counter to everything discussed in National Fire Academy

class on the Strategic Management of Change. My town manager holds more with the management

theory "I will tell them and they will do it!", so there were no nice foundations of shared vision or

consciences strategies upon which to construct change. Like it or not we were asked to manage the

future the old fashion way.

As I conducted the research for this project I discussed the assumptions of each theory with my

staff and together we determined if the application would help our cause. We have had great freedom

over the last six months to implement, refine, or redesign as necessary. Collectively we decided to

model the change plan suggested by Schein, in 1993. Modifications were made to Schein's plan to

encompass elements introduced by other authors.

Any opportunity to create anxiety within the department through the privatization of the

ambulance service was lost with the redistribution of funds to the police department. So we decided to

create anxiety in the officer's corps. New cleaning policies for the stations, apparatus, and equipment

were rigidly enforced, followed closely by a new grooming and uniform standard.

As the improvement in the appearance of the department became apparent the change plan was

introduced in phases.   A measure of our success occurred in April, 1998, when one of my deputy

chiefs was named EMS Administrator of the Year by the director of our EMS district.

I attribute some of our success to the correctness of the theories discovered during the research

phase of this study. Whether its McGregor's, Social Influences, or Schein's, Organization Culture, or

Hamel & Prahalad's, Core Competencies, they all shared an under lying theme. The theme is the

tendency of humans to solve problems, model behavior, adapt behavior to gain acceptance, and

respond to positive reinforcement. Thus far, the members of the Salem Fire Rescue Department have

reacted as the theory predicted they would.

I also attribute some of our success to the freedom the senior staff enjoys in the application of the theory. We are allowed to be wrong, redesign, and try again. This means we do not have to try to shift blame to our subordinates in an attempt to "save face." I believe in a small organization this environment is quickly understood and contributes to the stabilization the unstableness caused by change.

In conclusion for the last 19 years I have witnessed several fire department administrations attempt to introduce change. Some have been successful, many have failed. To the best of my knowledge this is the first time anyone has tried to change the culture of the department. Although the process is not complete the early results have been very encouraging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Confronted by the same problems a few years ago the staff of the fire department would have talked about the need to change attitudes. This would have been done on a case by case basis one individual at a time. Using this change plan the department is trying to change the attitude of the whole department all at once. As noted the department is six months into the process and although the early results are encouraging it will be some time before the final results are known.

Although not completely finalized with the writing of this report future phases of the plan are being designed. The need to improve communication from the top to the bottom of the organization has yet be satisfactorily addressed. The awards program although well received has been recommended to be redesigned. There is concern being expressed by the some of the firefighters that the standards for recognition be raised. The testing process used to select officers needs to be revamped to include

emergency medicine management skills.

Early indications suggest education on modern management techniques for even the lowest ranking officers is a must. It is from these ranks the future leaders will arise and it is better to develop them now than when they are advanced in rank.

The empowerment of the organization to try new things without the fear of punishment is in itself a powerful agent to effect change and should not be excluded from the culture of an organization.

Lastly, even with these early results I can not imagine trying to introduce large scale change within an organization without first understanding its culture. In this arena, the most successful role a fire service leader may assume just might be that of an anthropologist.

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APPENDIX A

SALEM FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT
ORGANIZATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY
(Firefighter)

The purpose of this survey is to determine the attitudes of our employees towards the organization change that recently occurred within the department. The data from this survey will be utilized in an "Applied Research Project" for the National Fire Academy. Results from the survey may also be used to inform administration of employee's opinions and as a bases for recommendations of future professional development opportunities.

How long have you been employed by the Salem Fire Department?
        Less than 10 years:__4___   15 years to less than 20 years:__11__
        10 years to less than 15 years:__10__ 20 years and over:__8___

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in firefighting?
        Strongly agree __23__
        Agree   __6___
        Slightly agree   __4___
        Slightly disagree   _____
        Disagree   _____
        Strongly disagree   _____

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in emergency medicine?
        Strongly agree __2___
        Agree   __1___
        Slightly agree   __1___
        Slightly disagree   __6___
        Disagree   __12__
        Strongly disagree   __11__

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in fire prevention?
        Strongly agree _____
        Agree   _____
        Slightly agree   __1___
        Slightly disagree   _____
        Disagree   __30__
        Strongly disagree   __2___

We are paid as well as people with similar jobs in other fire departments?
    Strongly agree __10__
    Agree   __12__
    Slightly agree   __8___
    Slightly disagree   __2___
    Disagree   __1___
    Strongly disagree   _____

Our fringe benefits are as good as other peoples' with similar jobs in other fire departments?
    Strongly agree __11__
    Agree   __20__
    Slightly agree   __2___
    Slightly disagree   _____
    Disagree   _____
    Strongly disagree   _____

My job, day to day has changed little from the time I was first employed by the fire department?
    Strongly agree __8___
    Agree   __19__
    Slightly agree   __6___
    Slightly disagree   _____
    Disagree   _____
    Strongly disagree   _____

Do you feel that the organization can continue business as usual or do you feel that we must adapt to survive with the changes that are occurring in the fire service today?
    Business as usual:__12__   Must change to survive:__21__

What do you feel was the major driving force behind our organizational change?_____
    __Save money - 10, More police - 9, Save jobs - 14_____
    _____

Do you feel that the union and management must work together to obtain common goals to survive in the future?   Yes__28__   No__5___

Rate the relationship between upper management and the personnel of the Fire Department?
    Excellent   _____
    Above Satisfactory   __6___
    Satisfactory   __10__
    Acceptable   __9___
    Needs improvement   __8___
    Adversarial   _____

Do you feel that the relationship was effected by the organizational changes that recently occurred?
Yes__14__   No__19__

Do you believe there is a commitment from top management to allow and promote change so as to
enhance department survivability?   Yes__26__   No__7___

Do you believe that top management is willing to allow you to set goals and help you meet the
objectives of your career?   Yes__16__   No__17__

How would you rate the communications, or flow of information from top management?

      Excellent   _____
      Above Satisfactory   __7___
      Satisfactory   __9___
      Acceptable   __9___
      Needs improvement   __8___
      Unacceptable   _____

Rate the relationship between company officers and the firefighters of the Fire Department?

      Excellent   _____
      Above Satisfactory   __4___
      Satisfactory   __6___
      Acceptable   __10__
      Needs improvement   __11__
      Adversarial   __2___

Do you feel that the relationship was effected by the organizational changes that recently occurred?
Yes__30__   No__3___

Do you believe there is a commitment from your company officer to allow and promote change so as to
enhance department survivability?   Yes__6___   No__27__

Do you believe that your company officer is willing to allow you to set goals and help you meet the
objectives of your career?   Yes__6___   No__27__

How would you rate the communications, or flow of information from your company officer?

      Excellent   _____
      Above Satisfactory   __3___
      Satisfactory   __4___
      Acceptable   __10__
      Needs improvement   __16__
      Unacceptable   _____

Are your extra efforts to provide a quality service to our customers recognized by top management?
     Yes__6___   No__27__

Thank you for your participation in this project.

APPENDIX B

SALEM FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT
ORGANIZATION ASSESSMENT SURVEY
(Company Officer)

The purpose of this survey is to determine the attitudes of our employees towards the organization change that recently occurred within the department. The data from this survey will be utilized in an "Applied Research Project" for the National Fire Academy. Results from the survey may also be used to inform administration of employee's opinions and as a bases for recommendations of future professional development opportunities.

How long have you been employed by the Salem Fire Department?
      Less than 10 years:_____   15 years to less than 20 years:__6___
      10 years to less than 15 years:_____   20 years and over:__6___

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in firefighting?
      Strongly agree __12__
      Agree   _____
      Slightly agree   _____
      Slightly disagree   _____
      Disagree   _____
      Strongly disagree   _____

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in emergency medicine?
      Strongly agree _____
      Agree   _____
      Slightly agree   _____
      Slightly disagree   _____
      Disagree   __4___
      Strongly disagree   __8___

Was the principal reason you sought employment with the department was to pursue a career in fire prevention?
      Strongly agree _____
      Agree   _____
      Slightly agree   _____
      Slightly disagree   _____
      Disagree   __4___
      Strongly disagree   __8___

We are paid as well as people with similar jobs in other fire departments?

     Strongly agree   __2___

     Agree   __6___

     Slightly agree   __4___

     Slightly disagree   _____

     Disagree   _____

     Strongly disagree   _____

Our fringe benefits are as good as other peoples' with similar jobs in other fire departments?

     Strongly agree   __6___

     Agree   __4___

     Slightly agree   __2___

     Slightly disagree   _____

     Disagree   _____

     Strongly disagree   _____

My job, day to day has changed little from the time I was first employed by the fire department?

     Strongly agree   __8___

     Agree   __4___

     Slightly agree   _____

     Slightly disagree   _____

     Disagree   _____

     Strongly disagree   _____

Do you feel that the organization can continue business as usual or do you feel that we must adapt to survive with the changes that are occurring in the fire service today?

     Business as usual:__9___   Must change to survive:__3___

What do you feel was the major driving force behind our organizational change?_____
__Save money-7, More police-3, Save jobs-2_____
_____

Do you feel that the union and management must work together to obtain common goals to survive in the future?   Yes__8___   No__4___

Rate the relationship between upper management and the personnel of the Fire Department?

     Excellent   _____

     Above Satisfactory   _____

     Satisfactory   __5___

     Acceptable   __6___

     Needs improvement   __1___

     Adversarial   _____

Do you feel that the relationship was effected by the organizational changes that recently occurred?
Yes__10__   No__2___

Do you believe there is a commitment from top management to allow and promote change so as to enhance department survivability?   Yes__8___   No__4___

Do you believe that top management is willing to allow you to set goals and help you meet the objectives of your career?   Yes__3___   No__9___

How would you rate the communications, or flow of information from top management?
            Excellent   _____
            Above Satisfactory   _____
            Satisfactory   _____
            Acceptable   _____
            Needs improvement   __9___
            Unacceptable   __3___

Rate the relationship between you and your firefighters?
            Excellent   _____
            Above Satisfactory   __8___
            Satisfactory   __2___
            Acceptable   __2___
            Needs improvement   _____
            Adversarial   _____

Do you feel that the relationship was effected by the organizational changes that recently occurred?
Yes__12__   No_____

Do you believe you are committed to allow and promote change so as to enhance department survivability?   Yes__12__   No_____

Do you believe that you are willing to allow your firefighters to set goals and help them meet the objectives of their career?   Yes__12__   No_____

How would you rate the communications, or flow of information from you to your firefighters?
            Excellent   __4___
            Above Satisfactory   __7___
            Satisfactory   __1___
            Acceptable   _____
            Needs improvement   _____
            Unacceptable   _____

Are your extra efforts to provide a quality service to our customers recognized by top management?
Yes__2___   No__10__

Thank you for your participation in this project.